

The Purpose of Death

Things happen in our lives that seem inexplicable. We sometimes cannot understand how a Sovereign God would allow such painful moments and events in our lives. Today's text has some important answers for us.

John 11:1-16

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. **2** It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. **3** So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." **4** But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **6** So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. **7** Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." **8** The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" **9** Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. **10** But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." **11** After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." **12** The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." **13** Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. **14** Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, **15** and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." **16** So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

John 11 records the seventh sign of the seven signs in John's gospel, and it is the greatest of them all — Jesus raises His friend Lazarus from the dead. But leading up to this great miracle are some extremely significant teachings.

I. **Jesus allows His best friends to suffer (vv.1-6)**

Lazarus and his sisters were some of Jesus' very best friends. The sisters believed that it would be quite enough to get Jesus' attention by sending their urgent message, "he whom you love is ill." But Jesus seems to dally—almost in a cavalier manner. What is this all about?

II. **Jesus allows us to suffer for His purposes (vv. 4, 7-15)**

Jesus is not cavalier at all, but rather highly intentional. He has two purposes in delaying His help:

1. Jesus will be glorified (4)

This may be difficult for us to understand, but the Son of God is more glorified by raising a dead man than by healing a sick man.

2. Our faith is established (15)

When we wait upon the Lord, and He rescues us, we come to trust Him more deeply. Our faith is precious to Jesus, for it is the instrument of our drawing more closely to Him.

III. **We often struggle to understand Jesus' delays (v. 16)**

Thomas was willing to follow Jesus back to Judea, but he assumed that this would cost him his life. He was so obsessed with his own safety, he couldn't contemplate Jesus' broader purposes. So it often is with us.

Discussion Questions

1. Recount an experience when you were eager for God to come to your rescue, but He seemed to delay His coming. How did this experience affect you?
2. In your experience, how has God glorified Himself and strengthened your faith through His delays in rescuing you?
3. How does God glorify Himself through the sufferings in our lives that never seem to get resolved in this life?
4. How can we bolster our confidence that God has not abandoned us in our sufferings?
5. What was commendable about Thomas' response in v.16? What was not commendable?

Going Deeper

1. What has been/is the most difficult suffering in your life? How have you sensed God at work in your suffering? What have been the unresolved aspects of the suffering? Why do you think Jesus has delayed in solving these problems?
2. What is most difficult for you when you are waiting for Jesus to heal and help you?

